FIRESTORM

Issue #16
Secret Origins
Part Two

Stuart Moore
22 pages
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PAGE ONE

Panel 1: A solar-system atom -- like the one we saw on page 1 of issue #15. The electron paths are clearly visible, but the "nucleus" is a raging fire. Dark space behind, dotted with stars.

CAPTION: HOW FAR BACK CAN YOU REMEMBER?

CAPTION: CAN YOU CAST YOUR MIND BACK TO YOUR <u>FIRST MOMENT</u> OF CONSCIOUSNESS...

Panel 2: Small shot -- maybe an inset -- of two old, withered hands knitting yarn with big, sharp needles. The needles are pointed downward.

SFX: TIK TIK

Panel 3: Zoom in on the nucleus, which we now see is a raging sun. Show us just the edge of the electron-trails around, for continuity. Superimposed over the sun is a naked figure of Jason Rusch, curled up fetally. His eyes are shut, and he's naked; the flames aren't harming him, but they *are* strategically covering parts of his anatomy.

CAPTION: ...BEFORE YOU WERE <u>BORN</u>?

Panel 4: Another small inset. The hands again, still knitting, the needles pointed more upward now.

SFX: TIK TIK

Panel 5: Closeup Jason in the sun now. His eyes are scrunched shut, his teeth gritted with effort. The Firestorm energy is starting to surround him.

CAPTION: CAN YOU RECAPTURE, IN YOUR MIND, THE MOMENT -- THE <u>EXACT POINT IN TIME</u> --

CAPTION: -- WHEN YOU TRULY BECAME --

Panel 6: Third small inset. The hands are still knitting, holding the needles pointed upward now.

SFX: TIK TIK

Panel 7: Big panel. Surrounded by the transformation energy, Firestorm shoots off away from the sun/atom, which explodes in a fiery blaze behind him, engulfing the electron trails.

CAPTION: -- <u>YOU</u>?

SFX FIRESTORM: BAKKOOOOM

SFX SUN (big): VRRRROOOOSSSHH

PAGE TWO

Panel 1: Firestorm flies along through space, still surrounded by the transformation energy. His expression is determined.

SFX: BARROOOM

Panel 2: Tiny panel. On the tips of the two knitting needles as they touch.

SFX (small): TIK

Panel 3: Continuing from panel 1 -- but now it's Jason flying through space, still surrounded by the energy. He looks alarmed.

SFX: BARROOOM

Panel 4: Another tiny panel: a different angle on the knitting needles as they touch again.

SFX (small): TIK

Panel 5: And back to Firestorm flying through empty space. He looks determined, strained, teeth gritted now. Transformation energy still surrounds him.

SFX: BARROOOM

Panel 6: The needles scrape past each other, one sliding upward as though finishing off a stitch. Behind them, we can now see the edge of Dr. Otaki's sharp chin.

SFX (small): SKISSH

Panel 7: Just a big, explosive shot of the Firestorm transformation energy, against the void of space. We can see a human figure inside, but we can't make out who it is.

SFX(big): BA-KKOOOOM

PAGE THREE

Panel 1: Full-page splash. Still glowing with the energy, Jason lies, propped up on one arm, on a burned rug. He's looking up in alarm at Dr. Otaki, who glares calmly down at him, one eyebrow raised, from an elegant old wooden chair. She holds a just-finished scarf and the two knitting needles.

We're in Dr. Otaki's apartment, which is like a museum of old scientific equipment, furnished with Asian and (East) Indian antiquities. Old microscopes, astrolabes, globes, sundials, and compasses clutter every corner. The furniture is also very old and lovely -- Chinese and Indian rugs, carved wooden chairs, maybe an ivory or big marble coffee table. Have fun with it. Oh, and there's an ornate, steaming teapot on a small table next to Otaki's chair.

OTAKI: VERY COLORFUL.

OTAKI: ARE YOU FINISHED NOW?

TITLE: SECRET ORIGINS
PART TWO

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BLURB: JASON RUSCH IS AN ORDINARY TEENAGER -- EXCEPT IN TIMES OF DANGER. THEN HIS BODY GLOWS WITH THE POWER OF AN ATOMIC FURNACE, AND HE WIELDS THE PRIMAL FORCES OF THE UNIVERSE AS…

FIRESTORM

Created by Gerry Conway and Al Milgrom

PAGE FOUR

Panel 1: Closeup Jason as he tries to figure out the situation.

JASON: DOCTOR OTAKI!

CAPTION: UH-OH.

CAPTION: HOW MUCH DID SHE SEE?

Panel 2: Jason pulls himself awkwardly to his feet. Otaki frowns.

JASON: I , UH...I MUST HAVE BLACKED OUT OR SOMETHING...

JASON: IS THIS YOUR APARTMENT?

OTAKI: SAVE IT, YOUNG MAN.

Panel 3: On Jason, turned away from Otaki, grimacing at her words. She stands behind him, looking at him.

OTAKI: FIFTEEN HOURS AGO, YOU STAGGERED HOME HALF-DEAD --

OTAKI: -- OR RATHER, I SHOULD SAY, FIRESTORM DID.

OTAKI: SINCE THEN, IN YOUR DELIRIUM, YOU'VE CHANGED BACK AND FORTH AT LEAST SEVEN TIMES.

Panel 4: Jason winces as Otaki holds up the burned rug he was lying on. If you want to be accurate about Pile Agra rugs, go to: http://www.bbc.co.uk/antiques/collectors_guides/rugs_indianchinese.shtml .

OTAKI: YOU SINGED THIS RUG A BIT. IT'S A PILE AGRA -- IRREPLACEABLE.

JASON: I'M -- I'M SORRY --

Panel 5: Now she tosses the rug away, looking at it with a “What are you going to do?” expression.

OTAKI: FORGET IT.

OTAKI: GROWING UP IN THE JAPANESE INTERMENT CAMPS, I SAW MUCH STRANGER THINGS -- AND FAR WORSE TRAGEDIES.

PAGE FIVE

Panel 1: Otaki lowers herself delicately back into her chair. Jason follows her movements, trying to figure out what to do next.

JASON: THE...THE JAPANESE...

OTAKI: IT WAS A LONG TIME AGO...

OTAKI: AND YET, THESE THINGS SHAPE US. MAKE US THE PEOPLE WE ARE.

Panel 2: On Otaki, pouring tea now from that teapot.

OTAKI: TAKE YOU, FOR INSTANCE.

OTAKI: APPARENTLY, YOU'RE A SUPERHERO. BUT IT DOESN'T SEEM TO BE GOING TERRIBLY WELL FOR YOU.

Panel 3: On Jason, unsure but melting a bit, as Otaki hands him a steaming cup of tea.

OTAKI (off): CARE TO TALK ABOUT IT?

Panel 4: Big shot. Jason's pulled up a chair facing Otaki's, and the two of them are talking intensely. Get some of the color of the room in this panel -- the weird furnishings and old-world feel of it.

CAPTION: SO I TELL HER EVERYTHING.

CAPTION: WELL, ALMOST EVERYTHING. I LEAVE OUT A FEW DETAILS ABOUT DAD -- AND MOM.

CAPTION: I KNOW IT'S RISKY. I HARDLY KNOW THIS WOMAN.

CAPTION: BUT SOMEHOW, I TRUST HER. AND BESIDES, SHE ALREADY KNOWS I'M FIRESTORM.

CAPTION: THE REST...

Panel 5: On Otaki, looking off pensively.

CAPTION: ...IS JUST DETAILS.

OTAKI: ...FASCINATING.

OTAKI: SO YOU USED TO REQUIRE ANOTHER PERSON AS A SORT OF...BATTERY, WHEN YOU BECAME FIRESTORM? BUT YOU DON'T ANYMORE?

PAGE SIX

Panel 1: Otaki watches intently as Jason gestures at his own body.

JASON: THAT'S RIGHT. EVER SINCE I MERGED WITH RONNIE RAYMOND -- THE FIRST FIRESTORM.

JASON: HE'S...GONE NOW...BUT I GUESS HE MUST HAVE SUPERCHARGED ME UP FIRST. OR SOMETHING.

Panel 2: On Jason, thinking hard now.

JASON: THAT GUY WHO ATTACKED ME YESTERDAY...THE PIONIC MAN...*

JASON: HE SEEMED TO KNOW A LOT ABOUT ME. BUT HIS INFO WAS ALL OUT OF DATE.

JASON: HE SAID SOMETHING ABOUT WANTING TO SPLIT ME BACK INTO THE "TWO MEN" THAT FORMED ME. BUT THAT'S NOT HOW IT WORKS ANYMORE.

FOOTNOTE: *LAST ISSUE.

Panel 3: As Otaki watches, Jason makes a fist. He looks determined.

JASON: SOONER OR LATER, I'M GONNA HAVE TO FIGURE OUT WHO SENT HIM AFTER ME. BUT FIRST I'VE GOT TO BEAT HIM.

JASON: AFTER HE DUSTS HIMSELF OFF, HE'LL PROBABLY MAKE ANOTHER ASSAULT ON THE LAB. IF HE HASN'T ALREADY.

Panel 4: Now he gestures toward her. She has a hand to her chin, thinking.

JASON: CAN YOU HELP ME, DOC?

JASON: WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT PIONS?

OTAKI: HMMM...

Panel 5: On Otaki, a little sad and a little old-looking.

OTAKI: NOT MUCH. I WAS ALWAYS MORE OF AN ENGINEER…

OTAKI: AND ELEMENTARY PARTICLE PHYSICS HAS ADVANCED A LONG WAY SINCE I RETIRED.

PAGE SEVEN

Panel 1: Jason has risen, pacing away now. He looks troubled.

JASON: THE PIONIC MAN...HE SAID HE WAS TRANSFORMED AT THE LAB, AT LOWRANCE COLLEGE.

JASON: I WAS THERE...BUT I WAS TOO BUSY TO NOTICE WHAT WAS HAPPENING TO HIM.

Panel 2: Now he looks down. Behind him, Otaki looks angry.

JASON: I GUESS HE WAS RIGHT. IT'S MY FAULT...

OTAKI: IF YOU WANT TO WALLOW IN THE MISTAKES OF THE PAST, YOUNG MAN --

Panel 3: Closeup Otaki, cold.

OTAKI: -- YOU CAN DO IT ALONE.

Panel 4: Now he's turned back to face her. She looks away, still frowning.

JASON: SORRY. YOU'RE RIGHT.

JASON: WHAT DO YOU --

OTAKI: IT OCCURS TO ME YOU'RE APPROACHING THIS THE WRONG WAY. DON'T START BY TRYING TO WORK OUT THE PHYSICS OF THE SITUATION.

OTAKI: RATHER, THINK ABOUT THE RESOURCES YOU ALREADY HAVE AT YOUR DISPOSAL.

Panel 5: On Jason, eyes wide at the thought.

OTAKI (off): SPECIFICALLY: JUST BECAUSE YOU NO LONGER NEED TO COMBINE WITH SOMEONE ELSE TO BECOME FIRESTORM --

OTAKI (off): -- DOESN'T MEAN YOU CAN'T.

PAGE EIGHT

Panel 1: Big establishing shot of The Tank,the big Escher-like lab room of STAR Detroit. The hole in the roof has been hastily patched, and the tired staff is in the process of putting everything back together. Dr. Phaedon, pissed off as always, carries a large, broken, high-tech containment bottle, with a big nozzle and some controls on it, toward Dr. Kennedy. She looks exhausted.

PHAEDON: ...SMASHED ONE OF MY FEW REMAINING CONTAINMENT JARS.

PHAEDON: I'VE ONLY GOT ONE LEFT NOW!

FROM OFF: DOCTOR KENNEDY...?

Panel 2: Kennedy turns, weary but smiling, toward Jason, who's walking in the doorway, smiling sheepishly.

KENNEDY: JASON!

KENNEDY: OH, THANK GOD. AFTER THAT MAN ATTACKED, WE WERE AFRAID YOU --

JASON: I, UH, I GOT HIT ON THE HEAD BY SOME DEBRIS.

JASON: WALKED AROUND IN A DAZE FOR A WHILE, BUT I MANAGED TO GET MYSELF HOME.

Panel 3: Closeup Jason, hesitant.

JASON: DOCTOR...CAN I TALK TO YOU FOR A MINUTE?

JASON: IN PRIVATE?

Panel 4: They walk through the Tank door to the outer corridor together. Phaedon glares at their backs.

KENNEDY: SURE.

KENNEDY: YOU MISSED SOME EXCITEMENT LAST NIGHT. FIRESTORM WAS HERE!

PAGE NINE

Panel 1: Jason and Kennedy stand in a small reception area now, separated from an outside lobby by a (bulletproof) glass window. They're the only people there. Jason looks very uncomfortable; Kennedy's puzzled.

JASON: YEAH.

JASON: LISTEN, FIRST OFF -- I WANT TO APOLOGIZE FOR WHAT I SAID LAST NIGHT --

KENNEDY: APOLOGIZE?

KENNEDY: WHAT FOR?

Panel 2: On Jason, slightly panicked. Behind him is a flashback image of issue #15, page 19, panel 1, including the word balloons: Firestorm, dazed on the lab floor, pulling away from Dr. Kennedy's outstretched hand.

FIRESTORM (flashback): I'M <u>FINE</u>!

FIRESTORM (flashback): I DON'T NEED YOUR HELP!

CAPTION: OOPS. THAT WASN'T ME --

CAPTION: WASN'T <u>JASON</u>, I MEAN. IT WAS <u>FIRESTORM</u>.

Panel 3: Jason speaks sheepishly to Kennedy. She’s turned away, thinking.

CAPTION: STILL DON'T QUITE HAVE THE HANG OF THIS <u>SECRET IDENTITY</u> SHIZZLE...

JASON: UH, NOTHING.

KENNEDY: YOU KNOW, IT'S ODD. LAST NIGHT, DURING THE BATTLE...

Panel 4: Closeup Kennedy as she turns toward Jason, curious.

KENNEDY: <u>FIRESTORM</u> CALLED ME BY <u>NAME</u>.

KENNEDY: BUT I'VE NEVER <u>MET</u> HIM BEFORE...<u>HAVE</u> I?

Panel 5: Jason spreads his arms, and the Firestorm transformation energy billows out around him and the surprised Dr. Kennedy.

CAPTION: WELL...IF THAT'S NOT A <u>CUE</u>, I'VE NEVER HEARD ONE.

CAPTION: GUESS I'VE GOTTA DO THIS...

JASON: BRACE YOURSELF, DOCTOR.

JASON: YOU CAN ASK FIRESTORM YOURSELF --

SFX: BAKKOOOOM

PAGE TEN

Panel 1: Big establishing shot. This is the new version of the Firestorm mindscape: another version of the solar-system atom, with Jason standing in the center. When he flies or walks, the "atom" will pivot around him like a gyroscope. Anyone else in the matrix -- Dr. Kennedy, right now -- "orbits" around him along a visible electron trail. The background is high, surging flames, reminiscent of Firestorm's head -- or of the raging sun on page 1.

In this panel, Kennedy "orbits" at a high level. She's a little panicked, and he tries to smile up at her reassuringly.

JASON: -- FROM THE INSIDE.

KENNEDY: WH-WHAT?

KENNEDY: WHAT IS THIS?!

Panel 2: On Jason, a little nervous.

JASON: DON'T PANIC -- PLEASE. IT'S ALL RIGHT.

JASON: THIS IS FIRESTORM. HE'S ME. AND RIGHT NOW --

JASON: HE'S YOU, TOO.

CAPTION: I SOUND PRETTY COOL...I HOPE...

CAPTION: BUT THIS ALL LOOKS DIFFERENT THAN IT USED TO.

Panel 3: Wide shot. Jason stands, looking at Kennedy, who swoops slowly past him. She's calming down now.

CAPTION: I HOPE I CAN CONTROL THE REACTION...

KENNEDY: FIRESTORM. HE'S...YOU…COMBINED WITH SOMEONE ELSE?

JASON: SOMETIMES.

JASON: DON'T WORRY -- YOU WON'T REMEMBER THIS AT ALL, LATER.

Panel 4: Outside world shot. Firestorm stands, in the exact same position Jason held in panel 3. Angle this shot so we can’t see the outer lobby, or the window leading to it. Kennedy appears as a floating “Martin Stein” head next to Firestorm. (I always think those heads look best as big as possible -- let’s have her take up as much of the background as you can manage.)

FIRESTORM: AT LEAST, I DON'T <u>THINK</u> YOU WILL. I'M NOT SURE ABOUT ALL THE RULES ANYMORE.

FIRESTORM: BUT I NEED YOUR <u>HELP</u> -- TO DEAL WITH --

FROM OFF: BING BING

PAGE ELEVEN

Panel 1: Over the startled Firestorm's shoulder as he turns to see the Pionic Man, standing on the other side of the reception glass, smiling nastily and holding up a hand to wave at him. We don't have to see it yet, but he's plugged the hole in his suit with some kind of metallic patch.

FIRESTORM (small): -- WITH --

PIONIC MAN: HERE TO SEE <u>FIRESTORM</u>.

PIONIC MAN: I HAVE A TEN O'CLOCK?

Panel 2: Pionic Man blasts through the glass with a pion-stream, knocking Firestorm backward against the back of the reception area. The big head of Kennedy watches, stunned.

SFX BEAM: FZZZZZZTTT

SFX GLASS: KASSSHHH

FIRESTORM: AAGGHH!

Panel 3: The Pionic Man advances angrily toward Firestorm, who flies, a little dazed, up toward the ceiling and off to one side. Kennedy-head follows him, alarmed. Kennedy talks in those telepathic captions, I guess.

PIONIC MAN: DON'T RUN AWAY, FIRESTORM.

PIONIC MAN: YOU <u>ARE</u> GOING TO LISTEN TO ME.

KENNEDY: WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

Panel 4: Inside the Firestorm mindscape. Jason's in the same position as Firestorm was last panel, angled as if to "fly" upward, and the atom pivots at the appropriate angle. Kennedy is roughly at his level, still flying along one of the electron trails.

JASON: GETTING US OUT OF HERE. I CAN'T FIGHT THIS GUY IN CLOSE QUARTERS.

JASON: LISTEN -- DOCTOR KENNEDY -- YOU'RE A PARTICLE PHYSICIST. I <u>NEED</u> YOU -- I NEED YOUR SCIENTIFIC KNOW-HOW TO WIN THIS FIGHT.

Panel 5: Small closeup Kennedy, grimacing.

JASON (off): CAN YOU HELP ME?

KENNEDY: I'LL…

KENNEDY: I'LL TRY.

PAGE TWELVE

Panel 1: Exterior shot. Firestorm has just flown out of a hole in the STAR roof, which he's made by turning it to gas. The Pionic Man follows, snarling at him. Kennedy-head floats next to Firestorm, talking to him.

KENNEDY: WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT HIM?

FIRESTORM: HE'S MADE OF PIONS -- WHATEVER THEY ARE.

FIRESTORM: AND HE TALKS A HELL OF A LOT.

PIONIC MAN: …TELL YOU ABOUT A SUMMER I SPENT IN FRANCE AS AN UNDERGRADUATE…WITH AN EXQUISITE YOUNG LADY NAMED GISELLE…

Panel 2: Closeup Firestorm, teeth gritted, with Kennedy-head talking urgently to him.

KENNEDY: AND US? WHAT CAN WE DO?

FIRESTORM: UH…FIRE HEAT BEAMS -- FUSION BLASTS, I MEAN.

FIRESTORM: AND TRANSMUTE STUFF -- LIKE THAT CEILING I JUST TURNED INTO VAPOR.

PIONIC MAN (off): …THE TREES WERE IN BLOOM, THE SEINE WAS EXQUISITE IN THE MOONLIGHT…

Panel 3: On the Pionic Man, frowning as he lets loose another powerful pion beam.

PIONIC MAN: …AND SHE DUMPED ME.

PIONIC MAN: THINGS JUST NEVER SEEM TO WORK OUT, DO THEY?

SFX BEAM: FZZZZZZTTT

Panel 4: The beam hits Firestorm, knocking him spinning through the air. Kennedy-head watches intently.

FIRESTORM: UUH!

KENNEDY: OKAY. PIONS ARE UNSTABLE PARTICLES -- USUALLY CREATED IN A COSMIC-RAY COLLISION, OR BY PUMMELLING PROTONS IN A HIGH-ENERGY LAB.

KENNEDY: I NEED TO KNOW MORE. CAN YOU…I DON'T KNOW…TRANSMUTE THE AIR INTO A STREAMING CHAMBER?

Panel 5: Firestorm recovers his "balance" in mid-air, speaking to the Kennedy-head. She closes her eyes, concentrating.

FIRESTORM: MAYBE -- IF I HAD ANY IDEA WHAT ONE WAS.

FIRESTORM: CAN YOU PICTURE IT IN YOUR MIND?

KENNEDY: YES…

PAGE THIRTEEN

Panel 1: Big panel. Pionic Man is flying in for another attack. Between them, Firestorm has formed a streaming chamber -- a glowing mass of tubes and curved wires. I have one good reference shot of it; if I stupidly forget to send it along, you can find it at the inconveniently long URL http://imglib.lbl.gov/ImgLib/COLLECTIONS/BERKELEY-LAB/PARTICLE-DETECTION/SPARK-AND-STREAMER-CHAMBERS/images/97200329.lowres.jpeg . (Or just run a Google image search on "streaming chamber" -- it should be the first thing that comes up.) Kennedy-head looms large at Firestorm's shoulder, staring at the chamber.

Below, a small crowd has gathered in the parking lot, pointing upward. Include Dr. Hsu and Danny the pizza guy in the group.

PIONIC MAN: AH. IMPRESSIVE.

PIONIC MAN: SOMEONE'S BEEN WORKING LATE IN THE LAB!

KENNEDY: GOOD!

KENNEDY: NOW…WHEN HE FIRES AGAIN, WE CAN GET A SENSE OF --

Panel 2: Grinning, Pionic Man fires, smashing the streaming chamber to pieces. Firestorm flinches back, and Kennedy-head watches, alarmed.

PIONIC MAN: GOOD THEORY…

PIONIC MAN: BUT THE ENGINEERING NEEDS A LITTLE WORK.

SFX BEAM: FZZZZZZTTT

SFX: SKASSH

Panel 3: Inside the mindscape. Jason, again in the same position as Firestorm last panel, looks urgently at the orbiting Kennedy. She's thinking hard.

JASON: PLAN B?

KENNEDY: PLAN B.

KENNEDY: PIONS DECAY QUICKLY -- USUALLY BECAUSE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL FORCES. LIKE ELECTROMAGNETISM.

Panel 4: On Firestorm as he lets loose a wide-angle sfx blast from his hands. Make it transparent, a different effect from his usual transmutation or fusin blasts. The Kennedy-head, big, looks over his shoulder.

KENNEDY: IF YOU CAN INCREASE THE ELECTROMAGNETIC FIELD AROUND HIM -- THAT SHOULD WEAKEN HIM.

FIRESTORM: I ABOUT ONE-QUARTER UNDERSTAND THAT…

FIRESTORM: BUT I'LL GIVE IT A SHOT.

PAGE FOURTEEN

Panel 1: Two-shot, as they fight in mid-air. Pionic Man is firing pions, and they're hitting Firestorm, but with less force than before. Firestorm keeps up the electromagnetic field action, but he's sweating with the effort. Kennedy-head, big, looks over his shoulder.

KENNEDY: IT'S WORKING…

FIRESTORM: BUT…NOT ENOUGH. HE'S GONNA BREAK THROUGH SOON.

FIRESTORM: ANY OTHER IDEAS?

Panel 2: On the Kennedy-head, thinking, with Firestorm next to it. His teeth are gritted; he's awash in the conflicting energies.

KENNEDY: I CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING…

KENNEDY: TRANSMUTATION…OBVIOUSLY THAT CONTAINMENT SUIT OF HIS IS RESISTANT TO OUR POWERS --

Panel 3: Closeup Firestorm, shocked.

KENNEDY (off): -- OTHERWISE YOU WOULD HAVE JUST TURNED IT INTO HELIUM OR SOMETHING.

KENNEDY (off): RIGHT?

Panel 4: In the mindscape. A startled Jason whirls his head to look at the orbiting Kennedy.

JASON: I -- I NEVER THOUGHT --

JASON: I MEAN -- WOULDN'T THAT KILL HIM?

KENNEDY: MAYBE. MAYBE NOT.

Panel 5: Outside world. To the Pionic Man's surprise, Firestorm suddenly flies downward toward the STAR lab complex, firing a transmutation beam at its recently-patched roof. The Kennedy-head watches.

KENNEDY: LEAD HIM BACK TO THE LAB FIRST.

JASON: YOU GOT IT!

PAGE FIFTEEN

Panel 1: Big interior shot. Firestorm, accompanied by the Kennedy-head, flies down toward the floor of the Tank; a startled Dr. Phaedon looks up from his work on the containment jar, which we saw on page 8, panel 1. In the newly-reopened ceiling hole, the Pionic Man is just flying down after him.

PIONIC MAN: YOU CAN STOP RUNNING, FIRESTORM.

PIONIC MAN: IT'S TIME FOR MY REVENGE.

KENNEDY: …THAT'S IT -- RIGHT THERE.

FIRESTORM: I SEE IT…

Panel 2: Firestorm knocks Dr. Phaedon, a little roughly, away from the containment jar.

PIONIC MAN (off): NOT JUST FOR MY TRANSFORMATION --

FIRESTORM: ONE SIDE, DOC!

PHAEDON: HEY!

Panel 3: Pionic Man, hovering a little above the ground, fires a blast at Firestorm -- but Firestorm's already firing a transmutation blast back at him. In his other hand, Firestorm holds the containment bottle's nozzle.

PIONIC MAN: BUT FOR NOT GETTING TENURE. FOR GISELLE.

PIONIC MAN: FOR EVERYTHING BAD THAT'S EVER HAPPENED --

SFX BEAM: FZZZZZZTTT

Panel 4: On the Pionic Man as Firestorm's blast hits him. His suit is dissolving, and the pion-energy is starting to flash out in all directions. He looks disturbed, half-aware of what's happening.

PIONIC MAN (small): -- TO ME --

Panel 5: Same angle, but now he's just a chaotic mass of energy, rapidly losing human form.

PIONIC MAN: [unintelligible static]

PAGE SIXTEEN

Panel 1: As Kennedy-head directs him, and the lab workers watch, Firestorm sucks the loose pion-energy into the containment jar's nozzle.

KENNEDY: NOW!

SFX: SQZZZZZZZZZZZ

Panel 2: Tight on an LCD readout on the side of the jar.

SFX: ZZZZKK *

READOUT: FULL
SEAL ACTIVATED

Panel 3: The lab workers watch, unsure, as Firestorm points a finger angrily at the jar.

FIRESTORM: THERE! HOW DO YOU LIKE THAT?

FIRESTORM: AND YOU KNOW WHAT ELSE?

Panel 4: On Firestorm, ranting a little.

FIRESTORM: I'M SORRY ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU -- BACK AT THE PROTON COLLIDER. BUT THAT DIDN'T MAKE YOU A LOSER.

FIRESTORM: YOU'RE JUST A LOSER PERIOD!

Panel 5: Now Firestorm stalks off toward the reception area, with the Kennedy-head floating above, smiling at him. The lab workers watch him go; Phaedon yells angrily after him.

FIRESTORM: I GOTTA STOP TALKING TO MYSELF…

KENNEDY: THAT'S PROBABLY A GOOD IDEA.

PHAEDON: GREAT!

PHAEDON: NOW I HAVE NO CONTAINMENT JARS LEFT!

PAGE SEVENTEEN

Panel 1: Accompanied by the large Kennedy-head, Firestorm walks out into the shattered reception/lobby area. There's no one else around.

KENNEDY: WE'LL SHIP HIM OFF TO S.T.A.R. SAN FRANCISCO. SEE WHAT THEY CAN LEARN ABOUT HIM.

FIRESTORM: GOOD.

FIRESTORM: I'M STILL CURIOUS HOW HE KNEW SO MUCH ABOUT ME.

Panel 2: Inside the mindscape. Jason spreads his arms to begin the transformation, but Kennedy holds out a hand toward him. Flames burn, as always, behind them.

JASON: THANKS FOR YOUR HELP, DOCTOR.

JASON: GUESS WE CAN SPLIT NOW…

KENNEDY: JASON --

Panel 3: On Kennedy, still swinging around on the electron-trail, looking down at Jason. She's concerned, but not upset.

KENNEDY: BEFORE WE MERGED…YOU SAID YOU WANTED TO APOLOGIZE FOR LAST NIGHT.

KENNEDY: YOU MEANT FOR WHAT YOU SAID AS FIRESTORM…RIGHT?

Panel 4: Downshot on Jason, looking up. He feels kind of emotional, conflicted.

CAPTION: I…I CAN TELL HER THIS…

CAPTION: BECAUSE SHE WON'T REMEMBER IT LATER.

JASON: YEAH.

JASON: YOU TRIED TO HELP ME…AND I PUSHED YOU AWAY. BECAUSE YOU REMINDED ME OF MY MOM.

Panel 5: Maybe a silhouette shot here of Jason, still in the center of the atom, looking down and away, while Kennedy orbits around him.

JASON: I -- I THINK I'M KIND OF MAD AT MY MOM. FOR WALKING OUT ON ME.

JASON: I MEAN…I UNDERSTAND HOW IT WAS WITH MY DAD. IT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN EASY. BUT WHY…

PAGE EIGHTEEN

Panel 1: Small closeup Jason, vulnerable and a little scared.

JASON: WHY DIDN'T SHE TAKE ME WITH HER?

Panel 2: Closeup Kennedy, smiling down at him, kindly but a bit embarrassed.

KENNEDY: I DON'T KNOW.

KENNEDY: I GUESS THAT'S SOMETHING YOU'LL HAVE TO MAKE YOUR OWN PEACE WITH…EVENTUALLY.

Panel 3: On Jason, determined, as the transformation energy starts to form around him. We're still in the mindscape.

JASON: YEAH…

Panel 4: Outside world shot, as Jason and Kennedy blast apart in a burst of Firestorm-energy.

JASON: …I KNOW.

Panel 5: Now a nervous Jason reaches a hand down to help up Dr. Kennedy, who's staring at him with wide eyes.

CAPTION: HMM. AT LEAST --

CAPTION: I <u>HOPE</u> SHE WON'T REMEMBER --

KENNEDY: AAH!

KENNEDY: WHAT'S --

JASON: DOCTOR KENNEDY?

PAGE NINETEEN

Panel 1: Jason helps Kennedy to her feet. She looks around at the debris.

KENNEDY: JASON?

KENNEDY: WHAT HAPPENED?

JASON: YOU FELL DOWN -- HIT YOUR HEAD.

JASON: THAT GUY ATTACKED AGAIN -- THE PIONIC MAN. FIRESTORM STOPPED HIM…CAUGHT HIM IN DOCTOR PHAEDON'S CONTAINMENT BOTTLE.

Panel 2: Kennedy grimaces, holds a hand to her head. Jason watches her, warily.

KENNEDY: OH. WELL -- UH --

KENNEDY: -- I SUPPOSE WE'LL SHIP HIM OFF TO S.T.A.R. SAN FRANCISCO. SEE WHAT THEY CAN LEARN ABOUT HIM.

JASON: UH-HUH...

Panel 3: On Kennedy as she turns, suddenly, concern on her face.

KENNEDY: OH, JASON -- I'M SORRY. I'M JUST WORRIED ABOUT MYSELF HERE --

KENNEDY: ARE YOU OKAY?

Panel 4: They stand together for a moment, with her hand on his shoulder. He looks at it, uncomfortable.

NO DIALOGUE

Panel 5: Now he smiles hesitantly at her.

JASON: I'M...

JASON: I'M GETTING THERE.

PAGE TWENTY

Panel 1: Jason climbs the steps to his apartment building, deep in thought. The homeless guy sits by the stoop as always, happily eating a sandwich.

CAPTION: THAT FELT REALLY NATURAL -- HAVING SOMEONE ADVISE ME IN BATTLE, LIKE THAT.

CAPTION: NOT SOME CRACK ADDICT OR DUMBASS FRIEND OF MINE, BUT AN OLDER PERSON WHO REALLY KNOWS THEIR STUFF.

Panel 2: As Jason walks down the hallway, Dr. Otaki sticks her head out of his (Jason's) apartment door.

CAPTION: MAYBE -- MAYBE THAT'S HOW FIRESTORM IS REALLY SUPPOSED TO --

OTAKI: YOUNG MAN!

Panel 3: Still in the hall. Otaki fixes him with a sharp gaze.

OTAKI: HOW DID IT GO?

JASON: FEW SHAKY MINUTES, DOC.

JASON: BUT IT ALL WORKED OUT.

Panel 4: Closeup Jason, hesitant.

JASON: DOCTOR OTAKI...

JASON: DO YOU THINK I COULD...ASK YOU FOR ADVICE AGAIN SOMETIME? IF I NEED IT?

Panel 5: Matching closeup Otaki, frowning.

OTAKI: I'M A SEVENTY-THREE-YEAR-OLD RETIRED SCIENTIST, YOUNG MAN.

OTAKI: IT'S NOT LIKE I HAVE ANYTHING ELSE TO DO.

Panel 6: Now he smiles as he reaches for his doorknob. She looks back at him as she walks down the hall.

JASON: THANKS.

OTAKI: YOUR FATHER STOPPED BY, EARLIER. NICE MAN.

OTAKI: HE DROPPED SOMETHING OFF FOR YOU.

PAGE TWENTY-ONE

Panel 1: Jason walks in the door. He sees something on a table.

OTAKI CAPTION: "I LEFT IT INSIDE WITH YOUR FRIEND."

Panel 2: Over Jason's shoulder as he holds up the object. It's a photo of himself, around age ten, standing, smiling and happy, with both his parents. The perfect family, with his mother in the center. A post-it is attached to one corner.

POST-IT: J - THOUGHT YOU MIGHT LIKE THIS. HOPE YR GOOD. -DAD

Panel 3: Small shot of Jason, smiling, with a tear just forming in his eye.

FROM OFF: JASON RUSCH...?

Panel 4: Jason turns to see Mick, standing before him stiffly.

JASON: MICK?

JASON: WHAT'S...

Panel 5: Over Mick's shoulder at the startled Jason. Mick's form is changing now.

JASON: ...MICK?

Panel 6: Same angle as panel 4 -- but where Mick stood is now J'onn J'onnz, the Martian Manhunter.

JASON: …

JASON: <u>J'ONN J'ONNZ?</u>

PAGE TWENTY-TWO

Panel 1: Now Jason faces J'onn, who speaks to him urgently.

JASON: WHAT'S GOIN' ON? WHERE'S MICK?

J'ONN: I'LL EXPLAIN LATER.

J'ONN: RIGHT NOW...THE JLA NEEDS YOU.

Panel 2: J'onn watches as Jason begins the transformation.

J'ONN: WE NEED FIRESTORM. URGENTLY.

JASON: BUT...

JASON: ALL -- ALL RIGHT...

SFX: BAKKOOOOM

Panel 3: Over J'onn's shoulder; his form is changing again, now. Firestorm, still surrounded by energy, looks away from him, a little puzzled.

FIRESTORM: NOW.

FIRESTORM: WHAT'S SO --

Panel 4: Closeup Firestorm as he's blasted in the head, very hard, by a Green-Lantern-style emerald beam.

FIRESTORM: AAAH!

Panel 5: Big shot. Amazo now stands, exactly where the figure of J'onn was. He looks down at the unconscious Firestorm, green energy blazing out of the power-ring on his (Amazo's) finger.

NO DIALOGUE

Panel 6: Now Amazo heads out the door, Firestorm's limp form slung over his shoulder.

CAPTION: TO BE CONTINUED -- IN VILLAINS UNITED #4!